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Naaman, The Leper,

—AND—

PRINCESS SARAH, THE CAPTIVE MAID.

--BY--

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THE EDITOR PUBLISHING CO.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, whose encouragement has greatly aided me, this little book is affectionately inscribed.

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PROLOGUE.

It was dark and I wandered alone upon the shores of Time. I met a Sage to whom I said:

"Why art thou here, and what dost thou bear in thy hand?"

"I am seeking bright grains of Wisdom to fill the Palace of Truth. There are millions of grains, but only those which shine in the darkness are worthy. I am very old, yet have I gleaned but a few to take to the Master."

Then he showed me what he had, and lo! the tiny grains would not have filled a child's thimble. I grieved, and was discouraged, and said:

"I have found none; show me, I

pray thee, the place where thou hast found these."

Then he pointed to a rocky path over which his bleeding feet had just come. I thanked him and followed it. One tiny grain I found, which I bring to Thee now, my Master, praying that Thou wilt find it worthy some humble place in Thy Palace of Truth.

NAAMAN THE LEPER

AND

PRINCESS SARAH, THE CAPTIVE MAID.

"'Tis but a worm, Susanah!"

"Aye, brother, 'tis but a worm, and yet it hath destroyed my favorite rose-tree; and it is typical, too, of the gnawing fear which is eating my life away."

The last speaker, a beautiful young woman, was holding in her hand the worm-eaten bud of a Syrian moss-rose. Her delicate face was already chiseled with lines of melancholy, and the wells of her large, dark eyes were brimming with the overflow of tragic depths beneath.

"Susanah, what sayeth the leech now, of my brother, Naaman?" asked the young man reclining on the rug by Susanah's side.

"Alas, Beka! he hath decided that he can do no more. His last hope was in the sacred water with which the dead body of our holy priest, Kadesh, was washed before burial. This hath been faithfully administered in very strong doses, but without effect. Naaman, my beloved husband, is doomed to a leper's death;" and Susanah buried her face in one of the silken pillows of her couch and wept aloud.

It was in the midst of a scene of princely splendor, in that most beautiful and ancient city of the world, Damascus, that the foregoing conversation occurred. From the many cushioned rug on which Susanah reclined could be seen the large court of the palace, with its magnifi-

cent mosaic marble floor. Along the sides of this court were rows of Parian columns, dividing it into alcoves, loftily arched, and furnished with gorgeous rugs and luxurious pillows. The sides and ceilings of these alcoves were painted in arabesques, paneled and carved in elaborate gilded and colored effects. In the center of the court played a fountain, about the marble margin of which were placed large pots of brilliantly blooming flowers. Lemon, orange and citron trees lavished their perfume on the luminous air; soft-eyed gazelles lent graceful animation to the scene; while among the fragrant trees was heard the bul-bul's heavenly note. From one side of the court ascended a lofty staircase leading to a gallery which overlooked the court, and over its richly carved balustrade a trailing passion vine wound its wealth of purple bloom. At frequent intervals

along the sides of the court, bronze lamps were suspended, each forming the head of a dragon, whose body terminated in two branches opening out into the shape of bowls; in these bowls were placed the perfumed oil, and, the time being about the third hour of the night, the multitude of lights shed a soft radiance over the enchanting scene.

Susanah wore a loose robe of finest blue silk, embroidered in gold thread; this was drawn in just below the bust with a broad girdle of gold, richly encrusted with jacinths and chrysolites, the transparent blue and yellow stones harmonizing with the blue, gold-embroidered robe. An izzar, or veil, of white silk, similarly embroidered, was held in place by a band of gold, studded with the same beautiful gems, and the edges of her eye-lids were stained. She wore bracelets and anklets of gold, and from the latter de-

pended innumerable tiny bells which tinkled with every movement of her feet; while her fingers, stained at the tips, were covered to the middle joint with costly rings, set with all manner of precious stones.

Susanah's companion, Beka, the young half-brother of Naaman, was also handsomely attired in a loose robe, with a richly embroidered girdle over an inner vest, which was buttoned to the throat with brilliant carbuncles; and the band which held his kaffeh, or cap, in place, was fastened with the same green stones. Beside him lay his aba, which he had thrown aside upon entering; this latter garment being an outer wrap of finest camel's hair. Beka spoke:

"Weep not so bitterly, Susanah, there is one thing more which can be tried to restore my brother. Naaman hath carried always the amulet on which was written the talismanic

blessing of our sacred high-priest, Kadesh; over every wall of Naaman's dwelling is hung the egg-shell, the lump of alum, and the donkey's skull, to keep off the evil eye. His head was burned on top with a hot iron while he was yet an infant, which cautery should have prevented this loathsome disease. Now thou sayest that the water in which the dead body of our most holy high-priest, Kadesh, was washed before burial hath proved ineffectual; there is, therefore, but one thing left to do. Thou knowest what I mean, Susanah —our gods must be propitiated. Naaman hath no first-born son to offer as a burnt sacrifice; but hath he not been to me more than a father? The sacrifice of my life must be the means by which Naaman is to be restored to life, to happiness and thee."

Susanah sprang up into an attitude of startled attention at Beka's first

reference to the awful sacrifice of human life, which had not occurred to her because she had no son. Would El and Rimmon and all the gods of Syria combine to help her in this time of sore distress if this sacrifice should be made to them? Beka had spoken truly; the gods might well accept him in the place of a first-born son, for Naaman had reared and cared for him from his earliest infancy. She loved Beka and her woman's heart revolted at the thought of the awful sacrifice; but custom makes us all familiar with the most evil practices, and the dieties of Syria had demanded many a fair youth to satiate their fiery appetites; therefore, when Beka ceased speaking, Susanah answered him with mingled joy and grief:

"Wouldst thou do this for Naaman, dear Beka? It is like thy noble heart to think of it. Ah, Beka! if the

gods of Syria will accept thee, and restore my husband, Naaman, to health, think what happiness shall be thine—and mine. Thou shalt dwell forever with the most favored of the gods in that blissful abode where thy place shall ever be higher than ours, because thy sacrifice will be voluntary. But, dear Beka, how bitter—ah, how bitter 'twill be to give thy dear body to the flames!"

"Think not of that, dear Susanah! Grieve not for me. The pain will be but brief, and then—then—Susanah, thinkest thou our gods will give to me in the next world the heart of one I love vainly in this?"

"What, Beka! Thou lovest, and vainly? But who? I had not thought even the daughter of Ben-hadad could resist thee."

"'Tis not the haughty princess of Syria that I love, beautiful though she may be in the eyes of men. It is

another princess whose regal beauty and royal grace hath won my heart. But she worships not the gods of Syria, and would never link her fate with mine."

"Nonsense, Beka! But who is it? and where didst thou meet her?" asked Susanah, leaning forward eagerly to look more closely into the young man's face.

"Behold, Susanah, she is even now approaching to serve thee. The one I love is the princess Sarah, thy captive and slave."

CHAPTER II.

Three years before this story begins a battle had been fought at Ramoth-Gilead, between Ben-hadad, King of Syria, and the combined forces of Israel and Judah under their kings, Ahab and Jehoshaphat. The King of Judah had gone down to Samaria with his son, Jehorem, who was to marry Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The wicked and ambitious Ahab determined to seize this opportunity to war against the Syrians. Ben-hadad had failed to keep his promise to surrender the city of Ramoth-Gilead, and Ahab believed it could be taken by joining Jehoshaphat's forces to his own. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat the question:

"Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-Gilead to battle?"

Jehoshaphat generously placed himself and all his possessions at the disposal of Ahab in the following words:

"I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses."

But Jehoshaphat was not quite satisfied to go to battle without consulting the prophet of the Lord. He said to the King of Israel:

"Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day."

Now Ahab called four hundred of his prophets, who were false prophets, being given to the calf-worship of Jeroboam, and Ahab said to them:

"Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?"

The false prophets saw at once that Ahab desired this thing. If they prophesied evil to the enterprise he would be angry, and would banish them; if they prophesied success they would be richly rewarded. If Ahab

was killed they would still have a powerful friend in Jezebel, and be allowed to retain their present possessions. Therefore these politicians answered:

"Go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the King."

Then Zedekiah, the chief of these prophets, made him horns of iron; and he said: "Thus saith the Lord, with these thou shalt push the Syrians until thou hast consumed them."

Jehoshaphat did not like the faces of these lying prophets, therefore he said unto Ahab:

"Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him?"

And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat:

"There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him: for

he doth not prophesy good concern-me, but evil."

Jehoshaphat answered, deprecatingly:

"Let not the King say that he doth hate this prophet of the Lord."

And Ahab, seeing that Jehoshaphat's heart was set on the thing, sent for Micaiah. Now Micaiah was in prison for some offensive prophecy against the King, and the messenger who was sent for him, wishing to do him a good turn, said:

"Behold, now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the King with one mouth; let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good."

But Micaiah answered:

"As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak."

Micaiah accompanied the officer to the gate of the city where the two kings sat in royal state on their

thrones, surrounded by the officers of the city, and the four hundred prophets.

Jehoshaphat was deeply impressed by this imperial looking prophet with his tall erect figure and noble countenance. Micaiah wore a sleeveless garment of goat skin, which extended to the knees, and was girdled at the waist by a leathern cord. In this coarse attire he looked far more of a king than the ill-favored Ahab, whose prominent eyes, narrow forehead, and cruel-looking, square chin, combined with an inferior stature, made an ensemble which all his royal robes could not alter. Ahab looked darkly at Micaiah, and said:

"Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?"

Micaiah looked at the King scornfully. He knew that Ahab wished to humiliate him publicly. He was

jealous, moreover, for Jehovah, and his heart burned with hot indignation against the wicked king. He answered with irony, in the same words the false prophets had used.

"Go and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the King."

Ahab assuming an air of righteous indignation, said:

"How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?"

Then Micaiah threw back his head, and looking at the king with his blazing black eyes,he burst forth with the remarkable prophecy:

"I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd, and the Lord said: These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace."

Ahab interrupted him angrily, and turning to Jehoshaphat, said:

"Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy me no good concerning me, but evil?"

But Micaiah heeded not the rude interruption. His calm, clear voice went on:

"Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

"And the Lord said: Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

"And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said: I will persuade him.

"And the Lord said unto him: Wherewith? and he said: I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said: Thou shalt persuade him,

and prevail also; go forth and do so.

"Now, therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee."

Micaiah ceased speaking. During his prophecy his eyes were raised upward, as though he beheld with physical vision the picture he had just portrayed.

Zedekiah, seeing the white anger in Ahab's face, and hoping to impress the King with a great show of loyalty and zeal, went near to Micaiah and smote him on the cheek, saying:

"Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?"

No resentment showed in the calm face of the prophet as he answered:

"Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself."

The King of Israel was beside himself with anger, for Micaiah's prophecy rang true. Micaiah was a faithful prophet of Jehovah, and Ahab inwardly shuddered with the terrible conviction that the prophecy would be fulfilled. Calling an officer, he said grimly:

"Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with the bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come with peace."

Ahab conveyed by these words a strict command that if he was killed in battle, Micaiah's sentence was to be for life; but if Ahab hoped that the dauntless prophet would retract one word of what he said, he was speedily convinced of his mistake.

"If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me."

Then, as if to impress more deeply the minds of the people he turned to them and said:

"Hearken, O people, every one of you."

Micaiah was hurried to prison, and, for the time being, Ahab's cruel command was executed.

CHAPTER III.

To heed Micaiah's prophecy would be to acknowledge his belief in it; moreover, it did not seem possible that Ramoth-Gilead could hold out against the combined armies of Israel and Judah; therefore, Ahab urged Jehoshaphat to go with him and compel Ben-hadad to surrender the city. Jehoshaphat had gone to Samaria in the hope that a matrimonial alliance between the prince of Judah and the princess of Israel would prove an indissoluble tie between the two families; Jehoshaphat, deing a true servant of God, had grieved over the many years of strife between them. Thus, when urged by Ahab, he yielded, in the warmth of the new pact of friendship, and the two armies went against Ramoth-Gilead to battle.

The wily Ahab decided to disguise himself. He rightly conjectured that Ben-hadad would order his soldiers to concentrate their movements against himself, as the death of their King would mean rout to Israel's army. In consequence of this the Syrians believed Jehoshaphat, who wore his royal robes according to custom, to be King Ahab. Jehoshaphat, seeing so large a force directed solely against himself, cried out:

"Make haste, O Lord, to help me."

Then the soldiers of Ben-hadad perceived that it was not King Ahab and ceased from pursuing Jehoshaphat.

Now Naaman, one of the foremost Syrian soldiers who had pressed up to Jehoshaphat's chariot, guessed with quick perception, that Ahab must be disguised; therefore he bent all his energies to discover Israel's King. One chariot held a man low

of stature, whose charioteer was a powerful Nubian slave. Naaman had heard a description of Ahab and knew that he was an undersized man. Watching this man closely Naaman observed that he fought fiercely; therefore, drawing his bow at a venture, he smote the Israelite between his corselet and skirt of mail. Ahab spoke at once to his charioteer:

"Carry me now out of the host, for I am wounded."

The Nubian slave attempted to do so, but could make little headway through the struggling chariots and horses. Another slave held up the King of Israel in his chariot and the battle went on. All that awful day the King lived, while the wound in his abdomen filled the floor of the chariot with his kingly blood. The ferocious Syrians trampled the dead and dying Hebrews under the hoofs of their horses, and crushed

them under their chariot wheels. The foot soldiers cut off the heads of the dead, while many bodies were flayed, for human skins were articles of Syrian merchandise. The defeated Israelites scattered and fled to their tents; they were as "sheep that have not a shepherd." But not until the wings of mercifully approaching night wrapped the groaning earth in her dark embrace did Ahab's spirit yield. The battle was over; Micaiah's prophecy was fulfilled, and Israel had no master.

When Naaman shot the fatal arrow which ended the iniquitous life of Ahab, the Syrian King witnessed the deed, and after the battle was over he sent for Naaman to come to his tent. When Naaman entered Ben-hadad greeted him:

"Knowest thou, Naaman, that thy valor hath this day delivered Syria?"

Naaman's face flushed with grati-

fied pride. Until now he could not be sure whether his venturesome arrow had reached Ahab or another. It was no light thing to have his brave deed acknowledged and approved by the King. Moreover, it meant certain promotion. He bowed low as he answered, modestly:

"My lord King, I did but slay thy most powerful enemy. 'Twas but a soldier's duty."

"Aye," returned the King, "'twas but a soldier's duty; but knowest thou that Ahab's arrow was aimed at thy King's heart at the very moment when thy weapon reached its mark? Thus do I say that this day thou hast delivered Syria. From this day thou art Captain of the Host of the King of Syria."

Naaman was almost overwhelmed at this sudden and dazzling promotion. It meant the highest office in the King's bestowal. It meant wealth

and honor. Before Naaman could adjust his mind's eye to this brilliant vision the King spoke again:

"I see that thou art grateful, Naaman, although thy tongue is muffled now; but thou hast never been a man of much speaking, and we are satisfied to let thy brave deeds speak for themselves. Listen, now, while I give thee commands regarding the prisoners. Aleppo hath told me that there are but few of these, of both men and women; as to the men, thou knowest our custom. Have the iron rings put into their under lips, and fasten to these rings strong cords by which to lead them. Have the women treated with due courtesy and consideration; especially the little princess Sarah, daughter of Jehoshaphat, who shall be thy own special property. She will make an excellent handmaid for thy wife Susanah."

Then Naaman was dismissed and

found himself outside the King's tent, and under the burning stars. The full orbed moon shed its mild beams over the field of carnage, throwing a weird light over the tents, the broken chariots, the slain horses and men, all mingled in a confused mass, and strewn over the ground. Naaman's feet slipped through sanguine pools, but there were no groans to fright his listening ears, for the fierce Syrian soldiers never leave other than dead bodies on a conquered field.

Naaman's heart swelled within him. All that mortal man could desire was within his grasp; but all unknown to him then the most fatal and loathsome disease known to man had begun its insidious creep through his flesh and blood, and when he should reach the apex of his power the full knowledge was to come, which was to cast its blight over every hope, and fill his once dauntless soul with despair.

CHAPTER IV.

After Beka had made the surprising announcement to Susanah of his love for her Hebrew slave, Naaman's wife had no time in which to question him, for Sarah was approaching with the light refreshments of which Susanah always partook at this hour. As Sarah drew near she lowered the tray which she carried on her head, and placing it beside Susanah retired a little distance, and stood waiting for her mistress' further orders.

Sarah had so endeared herself to her mistress that Susanah had made her the overseer of the other female slaves and her own favorite attendant. Through a feeling of delicate consideration for her royal captive, Susanah had also forborne to have Sarah's ears bored through with an awl, and

she thus escaped the usual badge of servitude.

As Sarah stood with her hands loosely clasped before her in an attitude of proud humility, she was indeed an imperial looking maiden, notwithstanding her simple attire. A flowing sleeveless garment of fine white linen was buttoned on either shoulder, and loosely girdled below her bust with a purple Tyrian cord, which terminated in heavy tassels. About her shapely, dark head was twined a scarf of Damascus silk, striped with many colors, beneath which the glossy black braids of her hair hung far below her waist.

She was tall and finely formed. Courage and strength of purpose were indicated in her firmly moulded chin, and the resolute poise of her fine head. Her large black eyes were deep and mystical, like shadowy pools of shining water, and the rich color of her

lips and cheeks glowed with the fires of healthy youth. But her greatest fascination for Susanah lay in the serene self-poise which bespoke a heart at rest, and which had often been the subject of wondering meditation to the mercurial Syrian woman. She looked at Sarah now with a new interest, since Beka had avowed his love for her, and vaguely marveled that his words should not seem unseemly.

Beka and Susanah now partook of the refreshments and sherbet which Sarah had brought. When they had finished Susanah gave a signal and Sarah carried out the empty tray, returning almost immediately with the dancing girls who furnished the usual evening's amusement. When they had retired the story-tellers were brought and Susanah called one of them to her side.

"Relate to us now one of thy sim-

ple tales, Fatoom, and then thou shalt all retire. I am weary and fain would seek repose."

Fatoom clasped her hands at the back of her neck, and leaning negligently against a marble pillar thus began:

A STORY OF THE FLY AND THE WALL.

"A Fly once sat upon the Wall,
And said, 'You're very high and tall.'
The Wall replied, 'Though this be true,
The little Mouse has dug me through.'
Said Fly to Mouse, 'You make me stare.
What a digger you are, digger you are!'
The Mouse replied: 'Though thus you greet me,
You ought to know the Cat will eat me.'
Said Fly to Cat, 'I must declare,
What an eater you are, eater you are!'
The Cat replied, 'Do not delay me,
The Walking Stick will surely slay me.'
Said Fly to Stick, 'I must beware;
What a slayer you are, slayer you are!'
The Stick replied, 'I fear for my life,
Lest I fall in the hands of the Cutting Knife.'
Said Fly to Knife, 'You are sharp and fair;
What a cutter you are, cutter you are!'
The Knife replied, 'I'm crushed like pith,
If I fall in the forge of the Smiting Smith.'
Said Fly to Smith, 'You are strong as a bear;
What a smiter you are, smiter you are!'

The Smith replied, 'I was made by Allah.'
The Fly he turned and cried 'Muhullah!'
For a busy Spider had watched his prey,
And followed him steadily all the day,
And seeing him meddling with his neighbors,
Dispatched him, and ended all his labors.

* * *

One cannot attend to himself and all;
If he meddle with others he'll certainly fall.

When the story was finished Susanah clapped her hands in token of dismissal, and soon she and Beka were once more alone.

"Come to me early in the morning, Beka, I would talk further with thee," said Susanah; and having bid the young man an affectionate good-night she called for Sarah.

CHAPTER V.

"Thou art always gentle in thy movements, Sarah," said Susanah, as her handmaid brushed the long, dark locks of her mistress;—"thou art ever gentle, and yet, methinks thou art strong, too, for thy whole form and bearing betoken it. Aye, and thy heart must be strong, for thy demeaner is ever brave and calm."

"The Lord is my strength and song and He is become my salvation; He is my God, and my father's God, and I will exalt Him."

Sarah spoke the words solemnly, yet there was an exultant ring in her voice. Susanah could not see her face as Sarah was still engaged with her hair, but her own countenance expressed deep wonder.

"Thy God, Sarah! and dost thou

then worship but one God? Who is He? Tell me what He is like."

Sarah, in her turn, marveled greatly at her mistress' mood. While the wife of Naaman had always been kind she had never before entered into serious conversation with her Hebrew slave. Sarah's heart thrilled; she loved her mistress, what joy if she could bring Susanah to a knowledge of the true faith. Her deep and vibrant voice trembled as she answered:

"He is called Jehovah, and Lord of Lords. He is the One Creator of the universe and all that it contains; He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob."

"Who are Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob?" asked Susanah. "There is a noble mausoleum among the tombs, erected by Eliezer of Damascus, to his own and his master's memory; this tomb is decorated in beautiful

colors, and there is a picture of Eliezer's master painted on it, with this inscription:

"'ELIEZER OF DAMASCUS,
THE STEWARD OF ABRAM,
PRINCE
BELOVED OF THE GODS.'

"Can this Abram be the same?" asked Susanah.

"Aye, 'tis the tomb of Abraham, once Prince of Syria, from whom I am descended; and the God of Abraham, and of his son Isaac, and of his son's son, Jacob, is my God, and Jehovah is his name."

"Thou art indeed of royal blood, my Sarah; but how knowest thou that Jehovah is God over all?"

"I know because God talked with Abraham, and with Moses, and with the prophets. When my people were in captivity in Egypt God brought them up out of bondage into a land flowing with milk and honey. He

led them by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. He rained manna from heaven every morning for forty years to feed them while they wandered in the wilderness. His prophets have kept oil in the widow's cruse so that it failed not; stayed the sun in its course; aye, and raised the dead. I could tell thee of a thousand marvels and miracles, but I also know because I have his witness here in my heart."

Sarah dropped the brush and, in her eagerness, went in front of Susanah. "It is here that I know," she said, clasping her hands over her heart and looking earnestly at Susanah.

"But Sarah," said Susanah, "thy God hath sent thee into a strange land to be a captive and slave. Why is this?"

"Some of my fathers have disobeyed Jehovah, and our God doth

justly punish evil even unto the third and fourth generation. This curse was thundered from Mt. Ebal: 'Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity.' Moreover," she continued, "the Lord may have sent me to be a witness to thee that thou mayest know the true God."

There was a long silence. Susanah was absorbed in thought; Sarah watched her with trembling eagerness. At last Susanah said, slowly:

"Saidst thou not thy prophets had raised the dead?"

"Aye," answered Sarah. "The prophet Elijah did raise the son of a widow after he was dead. Elijah abode in her house and he kept her cruse of oil, and her barrel of meal full, when there was a sore famine in the land; then the widow's child died, and Elijah stretched himself on the child three times, and called on the

Lord to let his soul come into him again, and it was so; and the child lived again. I have seen the prophet Elijah, and his eyes were like flames of holy fire."

"Verily, it is a marvelous tale, Sarah. Then if the prophet of Jehovah can raise the dead, might he not also heal disease?"

"Is it not easier to heal disease than to raise the dead?" asked Sarah.

Susanah did not answer, but questioned Sarah again.

"Sarah, knowest thou that thy Lord Naaman is a leper?"

"Aye, the steward, Cheta, hath spoken to me of it."

"Dost thou think—oh, Sarah! thinkest thou I might dare to hope that the prophet Elijah might heal him?"

"Elijah is dead. He ascended into heaven in a chariot of fire, but his

mantle hath fallen upon the prophet Elisha, who is at Samaria. I had the news from the Arab chief, Bardesanes, when he passed through Damascus three moons ago. He told me that Elisha fed an hundred men with twenty loaves of barley, and a few full ears of corn; he also said that Elisha had raised from the dead the son of a Shunamite woman. Elisha is a true prophet of Jehovah, and can heal disease."

"Sarah, thy words ring true; it may be that Elisha can restore my husband, Naaman. If he healeth him, Sarah, then shalt thou be free, and thy God shall be my God; and if thy Lord Naaman will go to Samaria, and shall be healed there, then shall Beka be spared from passing through the fire. But why do thy hands tremble, Sarah? thou art not wont to be awkward at my toilet."

Sarah bravely steadied her voice, and answered truthfully:

"Because of what thou saidst concerning my Lord Beka;" and even as she spoke Susanah saw the conscious blood flame over Sarah's smooth brow. She laid her hand gently on the girl's shoulder.

"Perhaps I can guess what troubles thee, Sarah, but fear not. Now go—but first tell me, dost thou pray to thy God?"

"At morning, noon and night," answered Sarah.

"Then seek Jehovah's altar now, and pray for Naaman—and for Beka."

"There is here no altar to my God," said Sarah; "but I will seek him with all my heart;" and after this promise Sarah was dismissed.

CHAPTER VI.

As Sarah passed through the court on her way to her own apartment, a tall, heavy-set man seized her by the arm, saying:

"Not so fast, my pretty one, I would speak with thee."

"Release me, Cheta! There! never lay thy hand upon me in like manner again. Now, what wouldst thou?"

"Thou knowest well what I desire, Sarah. My lord Naaman hath said thou shalt be given me to wife. Why dost thou scorn me?"

"I do not scorn thee, Cheta, but I do not love thee, and if thou lovedst me thou wouldst not strive to force my will."

"Love! what is love?" asked Cheta, scornfully. "I can soon tell

thee what love is. It is but a bubble which breaketh while yet it is warm with the childish breath that formed it. It is but a flower of the field, that bloometh to-day and to-morrow it dieth; both love and the flower find the same decay."

"Say not so, Cheta. Love doth not perish like the dust with which its mortal object is clothed? It is a seed which, although it sometimes lieth long like hidden germ of wheat beneath the mold, still holdeth the elements of deathless life. Jehovah planted the first seed of love, and he plucked it from His own holy heart; for God is Love."

Cheta looked at Sarah with something of wonder in his eyes; then he said, slowly:

"I know not if I love thee, but I desire thee for my wife."

"But why, Cheta? If thou dost not love me why dost thou wish to wed me?"

"Because thou art beautiful—more beautiful than my lady Susanah, who is called the Lily of Damascus. Thou dost please me better. I look at the tender red of thy lips and cheeks; at the silky gloss of thy midnight hair; at the soft brilliancy of thine eyes; and at thy round, milk-white throat, and I long to possess thee. Aye, and I shall, for thou canst not escape me. I have the promise of Naaman, my lord;" and Cheta extended his arms as if to seize Sarah again, but she skilfully eluded him, and running through an alcove escaped into her own room at the rear of the palace.

Meanwhile, Susanah had sought Naaman and, although it was near the midnight hour, she found him still up and restlessly pacing the floor of his apartment. As she stepped within the door he raised his hand commandingly and said:

"Come no nearer to me, Susanah. What wouldst thou?"

"I have wondrous news for thee, Naaman. Sarah, my maid, hath told me of a prophet of her God who can heal thee!"

"Nay, Susanah, come not to me now with messages of hope. Thou knowest all the gods of Syria could not help me, then how could another? There was but one thing more that I could have done had a son been born unto me, but—"

"Oh, Naaman! I had not told thee all. But first I must tell thee how Beka hath desired to pass through the fire for thee, that the gods of Syria might be propitiated. That was before Sarah told me how the prophet Elisha might heal thee, and he is even now at Samaria. Sarah saith that the prophets of her God have raised the dead."

"Stay, Susanah; thy speech is incoherent. Sayest thou that Beka hath offered to pass through the fire

for me? But why? He is not my son?''

"He said that thou hadst been a father to him, and perhaps El and Rimmon, and all the gods of Syria might accept him in the place of a son for that reason. But, Naaman, my husband, heed it not. At least first try the Prophet of Jehovah, who is at Samaria.''

Naaman paused in his impatient walking to and fro. He was a stalwart man of heroic mold, with large limbs and massive muscles. In feature he bore, like all Syrians, a strong similitude to the Hebrew type. His forehead was low and straight, with a somewhat prominent brow and large, brilliant eyes; his nose was aquiline; his mouth firm with rather thick lips; his chin strong and symmetrical; his hands were crossed behind him—those hands which bore the only unconcealed evidence of the

loathsome disease which had claimed him as its victim. For several months he had not allowed his wife to come near his presence, and had of late been excused from personal attendance on his King. In Israel he would have been isolated and pronounced unclean; in Syria he still mingled with his fellows, although they all discreetly kept aloof from him. The disease had made little progress as yet, but Naaman knew that ultimately he must withdraw himself from all communication with his fellow men. He knew that before many months should pass he would be removed from his office as Captain of the Host of the King of Syria. His love for his wife had impelled him to keep her apart. All the leeches of Damascus, the priests and the prophets of all the numerous gods of Syria had been engaged in his behalf to work his healing; but nothing had availed, and Naaman had begun

to have dark thoughts of self-destruction when Susanah came to him. As he paused now he looked at her long and earnestly, with a faint gleam of hope in his passionate eyes. Susanah returned his look with a world of yearning in her tender, delicate face.

"The prophet of Jehovah," said Naaman, musingly, "I remember now that the Arab chief, Bardesanes, told me somewhat of him. Elisha! aye, 'tis the same name. Susanah, I will go to Samaria with rich gifts for this prophet. For thy sake I will try once more."

"May the blessing of all our gods attend thee, oh, my husband!" exclaimed Susanah, starting toward him with gladly extended arms; but Naaman cried out to her harshly:

"Back, Susanah! art thou mad?"

Then, seeing the grieved look in the sensitive face and quivering, childish mouth, he added gently:

"My poor Susanah! thou art sweet and true and sound to the core. Aye, and did I not love thee better than my life I could never bid thee stand aloof while my heart breaketh to take thee once more into these empty arms."

CHAPTER VII.

When Beka sought Susanah the next morning he found her surrounded by her servants, busily engaged in preparing for Naaman's comfort during his projected trip to Samaria. At sight of this busy scene and Susanah's evident cheerfulness, he exclaimed in wonder:

"What now, my sister? What meaneth all this confusion? It looketh as though one were about to make a journey!"

"Thou art a good guesser, my Beka," cried Susanah, gaily. "Thy brother is indeed to go on a journey this day."

"But wherefore, Susanah, and why art thou glad?" asked Beka in bewilderment.

"Ah, Beka! I rejoice because my

heart telleth me that this journey will result well for Naaman, for thee, and for me. See now, thou hast heard nothing about it! Come sit by me here, for I will rest a short season, and tell thee that which will fill thy kind heart with gladness."

Beka seated himself on the rug beside Susanah, who told him all that had occurred on the previous evening after he had left her.

"Sarah hath been always truthful and I believe her, my Beka. Oh I am so happy this morn, for the gods seem about to favor us at last!"

"Not 'our gods' Susanah; 'tis the God of Sarah whom Naaman is about to seek. If He be the God over all, as Sarah hath said, then shall I too serve him. The God of Sarah shall be my God."

"Aye, and mine, dear Beka. But in my selfish joy I am forgetting thy trouble. Tell me more about your

love for Sarah. Hast ever spoken to her about it?"

"Nay, Susanah, I have never spoken word to Sarah; but I have watched her, and each passing day she hath been to me more sweet and fair."

"Wouldst thou like to have speech with her, Beka? Thou shalt see her here if thou wish."

"Nay, Susanah. Naaman hath promised her to Cheta, and thou knowest that Naaman never breaketh his word. I had speech with him and he sayeth that Sarah shall wed Cheta, although Sarah doth not wish it, and she calleth Cheta a heathen."

"I promised Sarah yesternight her freedom if Naaman returneth healed. Leave the matter with me; I will persuade him," said Susanah, with a confident happy smile. Naaman seldom denied her anything, and his gratitude to Sarah for the suggestion

she had made—if it resulted in his cure—would make him more compliant.

"Naaman may listen to thee, and may even consent to my union with Sarah if thou persuadest him, but she may never care to listen to my pleading, and my heart is even now bound up in her. Let nothing be said, I pray thee, Susanah, until Naaman hath returned. If no good shall come of his trip there can be no hope for me, even if Sarah would listen."

"Methinks thou shouldst take heart of grace and speak for thyself unless thou art willing to yield the prize to an inferior; but I will speak to thee of this matter again. Go now and bid farewell to Naaman, thy brother, and bid him good-speed."

An hour later the caravan of Naaman moved out of the court-yard. Naaman's imposing figure in his chariot led the way; and at his side

Susanah was carried in her litter, for she desired to accompany him a little distance on the way. In another chariot rode Arpad, the favorite and most devoted servant of Naaman. Behind Naaman were his personal attendants on horseback. Then came the donkeys bearing the slaves who carried the treasure Naaman designed as a present to the prophet. This consisted of gold and silver bars, cut into convenient sizes, and bound up in sacks. There were ten talents of silver, or about the worth of $16,425 of our money; and 6,000 pieces of gold, being more than $48,000 of our money. Besides this gold and silver there were ten changes of raiment, made from the finest fabrics of Damascus, a present highly valued in the Orient to this day. These rich gifts, representing a fortune of about $75,000, were quite appropriate for a man of Naaman's wealth and posi-

tion, and not too lavish considering he hoped to be healed of a deadly malady. In the rear of the caravan was a long string of camels bearing still other slaves, who carried the tents and all the various paraphernalia attendant on a journey in those days.

Out of the court-yard, through the palace gates, and into the street called Straight moved the procession. The beautiful city was astir with all the restless energy of early morning life. Between the columns which lined the street on either side the various bazaars of merchandise were open, and their owners were loudly crying their wares. Soon they passed into a more quiet quarter of the city, where shaded groves and scented gardens, with fruitful orchards, where trees, weighted with fragrant bloom, lent their subtle charm to the beauty of the morning.

Out through the gate called Bab-Allah, where the busy scene became a confusing and noisy one, they passed. There were Arabs from the desert with their camels; corn merchants, Druses, and Bedawins, and shepherds with their flocks. Women passed with water jars upon their heads, and playing, shouting children gave an air of the liveliest commotion to the scene.

When the caravan had passed a mile beyond the city gates Naaman called a halt to bid his wife farewell. Susanah bade her slaves carry her litter to the side of Naaman's chariot, and as she leaned out her head from between the folds of the curtains Naaman bent his head and said:

"Farewell, Susanah, beloved one. My heart shall remain with thee until I return in peace."

"Farewell, and may the God of the prophet Elisha hear thy prayers. Re-

turn to me with such haste as thou canst." Then wife-like, she thought of one last question to ask him.

"Didst thou obtain the letter from the King of which thou didst speak?"

"Aye, Susanah, here it lieth in my bosom," and drawing from the folds of his aba a letter, he held it toward her. It was written on fine parchment, tightly rolled, bound with a scarlet thread of silk, and sealed in several places with the royal seal. Susanah nodded and smiled.

"'Twill help thy purpose greatly, without doubt," said she. "Once more farewell until we meet again."

CHAPTER VIII.

There was an undoubted sensation in the city of Samaria when the news was noised about that Naaman, Captain of the Host of Syria, had arrived, with a long retinue of servants and slaves, chariots, camels and horses. Israel was, at that time, in a state of dependence on Syria, never having recovered the ground lost at Ramoth-Gilead. There was much conjecture, therefore, as to whether Naaman's errand was a peaceable one or not. Joram, the King of Israel, as soon as he heard of Naaman's approach, sent out his attendants to meet him and to escort him with due honor into the royal presence. When the greetings between the two men were passed Naaman produced the letter which Ben-hadad had written, and delivered

it to the King of Israel. As Joram read his face changed; absolute consternation was depicted in his countenance. He read a portion of the letter aloud, in a trembling voice:

"Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy."

Then Joram rent his garments, and looking at Naaman with liveliest terror he exclaimed:

"Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore, consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me."

Joram's question proved how leprosy was regarded in Israel. Leprosy, being equivalent to death, recovering from it was literally making alive. Therefore, Joram said: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?"

Naaman was filled with astonishment. He hastened, however, to reassure the alarmed King of Israel.

"Fear not, my lord King, for my lord and King, Ben-hadad, seeketh no quarrel against thee."

At this moment Gehazi, a servant of the prophet Elisha, entered, breathless with haste, and evidently eager to deliver a message. The King of Israel signed to him to speak. With a low obeisance to the King, Gehazi said:

"Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Elisha, the prophet, hath said: 'Let Naaman come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.'"

Naaman's heart leaped at these words. The prophet Elisha must be very sure of his power to send such a message to the King. Joram looked greatly relieved, and turning to Naaman, dismissed him thus:

"Go thou with this man to the

prophet Elisha; and if he heal thee of thy leprosy do thou bear my royal greetings to Ben-hadad thy lord, and King of Syria."

Naaman withdrew with Gehazi, but could scarcely repress a smile at the attempt of the craven King of Israel to recover a show of dignified serenity.

Naaman had biddem Gehazi climb into the chariot with him, and fully expected to be conducted to a palace equal to his own at Damascus. He was, consequently, greatly surprised when Gehazi bid the charioteer stop before an humble looking house in the outskirts of the city. Gehazi dropped from the chariot, saying:

"I will call Elisha that he may come unto thee."

Naaman waited, confident that Elisha according to the unwritten code of Oriental etiquette would come out to meet him; and he

pleased himself with the picture of Elisha's gratitude and surprise over the noble gifts he had brought, which would enrich this poor prophet of Jehovah. Presently the door of the mean little house opened and Gehazi appeared; he approached the chariot, and said:

"Thus saith Elisha the prophet. 'Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.'"

Gehazi spoke the words as calmly as though the healing of a fatal disease was but an every day occurrence, and Elisha had cared not a jot for the rank of his distinguished visitor. Naaman's proud spirit was humiliated. Had he come on a long journey, and brought rich gifts, to be treated with so scant courtesy as this? He bade his charioteer drive on, and, turning to his favorite, Arpad, he said:

"Behold, I thought: 'He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?' "

Naaman's surprise and indignation were natural. Damascus boasted then, as she does to-day, of the finest water supply of any city in the East. The clear and sparkling waters of Abana and Pharpar were surely more desirable streams in which to bathe than the turgid river Jordan. But Arpad saw, what his master in his anger overlooked, that it was Elisha's evident intention to try Naaman's faith. Therefore he answered Naaman in a pleading voice:

"My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst

thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee: 'Wash and be clean.' "

Naaman made no answer then, and the caravan moved on toward home. He was thinking of the difference between his reception and the picture his mind's eye had called up. What could mean Elisha's strange indifference to the wealth that had been offered to him, for he had bid Gehazi tell Elisha that all the handsome presents he carried were intended for the prophet of Jehovah. Naaman marveled, and thoughtfully wondered at Elisha's action. Then before him came the vision of Susanah's face when he should tell her that he was not healed, and that he had refused to obey the prophet's commands; sweet Susanah, who was like a spring morning when he had wedded her five years before. How could he bear to meet the look of an-

guished disappointment in her lovely eyes. Her soul was white as a lily, but she was impulsive, and void of self-control as a child. He pictured her weeping and rending her garments, and his dark cheek was pale when he ordered the caravan to turn about. He said to Arpad:

"I will return and go to this river Jordan. Perchance the prophet is right."

Thus the caravan was turned about to retrace their steps to the river Jordan. Not a murmur was heard at the change of orders, for Naaman was beloved of all his household, albeit his commands were quickly heeded for he was a firm man. Thus, although they had journeyed three days toward home, they willingly returned to obey the prophet's command.

The river Jordan, where the caravan halted, was indeed a forbidding

stream. Its dark and muddy waters would scarce invite a fastidious man to plunge beneath its bosom. Naaman resolutely removed his outer garments, however, and entered the stream; he plunged beneath, and rose again, but there was no change; again, and still there was no change; but when Naaman arose from the water for the seventh time a remarkable change had taken place. He felt the new and healthy blood rush with regenerating power through every vein. With awe he looked first at his hands, to find them soft and firm, with new flesh. Nowhere about his person was there now the slightest evidence of the old, dread disease. If Naaman had failed to plunge beneath the water the seventh time there would have been no healing process within him. Elisha evidently had in mind the old law of purification, where the leper was sprinkled seven

times, and tarried out of his tent until the seventh day. Throughout the entire ceremony sevenfoldedness was the rule, and seven is the number of perfection. Naaman's resolution carried him through to the seventh time, and the captain of the Host of the King of Syria was healed.

CHAPTER IX.

The evil heart of Cheta was breeding mischief. He had observed the increasing fondness of Susanah for her Hebrew slave, and the growing indulgence of her manner to Sarah. He noticed that on several occasions when Sarah was attending her mistress, Beka was present, and the conversation between the three seemed general, and on a basis of equality and friendship. With eyes sharpened by the demon of jealousy he noticed that Beka's eyes followed Sarah's every movement, and he easily guessed Beka's secret. On these occasions Cheta ground his teeth with impotent rage, for so far Sarah had managed to avoid him since the night when he had declared his intention of marrying her. With subtle cunning he de-

cided to relax his vigilant watch lest suspicion should be aroused, and lay his own private plans. Sarah should never wed Beka; this beautiful prize should be his own. He would no longer await his master's return. Naaman had been absent now two weeks, and if he had prospered he should return very soon. Cheta would wait no longer lest Susanah and Beka should be plotting against him. During his service with his master he had saved a small sum. He decided to abduct Sarah and join some shepherds, who were to leave Damascus that night, and who were going to cross the mountains and settle with their flocks for a season in the valley of Lebanon. Among these shepherds he had some ill-favored friends; a few shekels would secure their aid. Cheta hastened away to perfect his plans.

The conversations which had attracted the attention of Cheta had

been on the subject of Naaman's journey, and the scarcely less engrossing one of Sarah's faith. Sarah's modest and dignified demeanor remained unchanged through the rather severe test of Susanah's evident friendliness, and the love which Beka no longer took pains to conceal. Beka was allowing himself to hope that his cause would prosper, but he loyally determined not to speak to Sarah until Naaman had returned, when Beka hoped to gain his consent to his marriage to Sarah through Susanah. The other slaves were frequently dismissed by Susanah, who retained Sarah to talk with her, and invited Beka to remain; an invitation which Beka always gratefully accepted.

On this particular evening Susanah was unusually silent; she left most of the conversation to Beka and Sarah, albeit her manner to the latter was none the less kind. Beka, absorbed

in his passion, and having no thought beyond the fact that he was with Sarah, and happy, had failed to notice the low spirits of Susanah. Sarah, however, had taken note of the fact, and she cast many anxious glances at her beloved mistress. At last she asked timidly:

"Art thou ill, my lady Susanah?"

Susanah started nervously — she often did that now—and Sarah observed with sorrow that Susanah's cheek was pale, and her beautiful eyes sad and heavy. Susanah answered, gently:

"Nay, Sarah, I am not ill; but my soul fainteth for news of Naaman, my husband."

"Be of good cheer, Susanah," said Beka, affectionately laying his hand upon her arm. "Naaman should be with us by the morrow."

"I know not why," answered Susanah, "but my heart faileth me with

fear. I am ever too fearful or too hopeful; but to-day the very air seemeth heavy with some brooding disaster."

"Nay, Susanah, lose not thy heart! But the on-coming night is indeed heavy, and the air seemeth deathly still, weighing upon the heart like the shadow of evil. Dost thou notice it, Sarah?"

"Aye, my lord Beka, the breath of life seemeth to drag but slowly, and all the world seemeth wrapped in the atmosphere of tombs; yet 'tis hot and weighty, like the breath of an evil spirit."

"Dost thou believe in evil spirits, Sarah?" asked Beka in some surprise.

"There is ever a spirit of evil abroad warring against the good; but the good shall conquer when the Holy One shall come."

"Dost thou mean another prophet, Sarah?" asked Beka.

"Aye; the prophet Balaam hath

said, 'There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.' Our God hath told us, too, through his servant Moses, 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.' "

"A 'Star,' and a 'Scepter,' and 'like unto me,' " repeated Beka, wonderingly. "Sarah, that soundeth as though he were to be thy King, and equal to thy God."

"Aye, my lord. When Jacob blessed his sons he said unto Judah: 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.' "

"From which one of Jacob's sons art thou descended, Sarah?" inquired Susanah, rousing herself with some show of interest in the conversation.

"I am descended from Judah, my lady Susanah."

"Then perhaps thou mayest become the mother of the Shiloh for whom thy people look," said Susanah, an accent of reverence in her voice.

"'Tis the hope of every Hebrew maid," answered Sarah modestly.

After this a long silence fell upon the little group; then the still air was startled by distant and low rumblings, accompanied by a slight trembling of the earth. Susanah's white cheek grew whiter, and she sprang nervously to her feet. The rumbling noise continued and the earth trembled again; this time more perceptibly than before.

"What meaneth it, Beka?" whispered Susanah, hoarsely; clinging the while to his arm.

"I know not, Susanah. I never felt aught like it before."

The earth now began to rock beneath their feet in an alarming

manner, and Susanah screamed aloud:

"The earth turneth over, and the great sea will overwhelm us and drown us. Sarah! Sarah! where art thou?"

But Sarah was nowhere to be seen; and the quaking earth rocked more violently than before.

CHAPTER X.

At first sight of Susanah's alarm Sarah had hastened from the apartment to seek in her mistress' private room for some restorative. She had found a bottle containing wine and was returning with swift footsteps when she felt herself rudely seized from behind, while a rough hand closed with cruel force over her mouth. Another person standing behind Cheta —for Sarah rightly guessed that her disguised captor was he—bound a silk handkerchief over her eyes; then she was lifted in strong arms and hastily borne away.

Soon she felt the night wind blowing on her face, and she marveled that her captor staggered and stumbled like a drunken man. In her confusion she had forgotten the cause of

Susanah's fright, and attributed the constant stumbling to Cheta's unsteady walk. Loud, rumbling noises affrighted her, and once Cheta fell, but quickly regained his feet. Suddenly she felt herself hurled violently out of Cheta's grasp, and then she sank deep into some soft substance which well-nigh smothered her. She tore the bandage from her eyes and looked around her with bewilderment. She realized at once that she was buried deep in fodder, and also that she was entirely unhurt. From where she lay she could see but little but the dark sky, with here and there a faintly glimmering star. Her ear caught the sound of neighing horses, lowing kine, and bleating sheep; with these sounds were mingled the voices of men calling to each other in frightened tones. This recalled the image of Susanah, who had cried out when the earth began to tremble; then Sarah knew that

there had been an earthquake. God had providentially delivered her out of Cheta's hand.

After some deliberation Sarah determined to remain where she was, not knowing what dangers might await her in the darkness and confusion. Being young and healthy she soon fell into a gentle slumber, notwithstanding her anxiety, and did not awake until the rosy feet of morn had blazed their crimson track athwart the eastern sky.

Sarah sat up and strove to collect herself. She was bewildered at first, but memory soon returned and she prepared to leave the shelter which had so lately proved her salvation. Creeping to the edge of the stack of fodder she shuddered to see a chasm some thirty feet in depth below the foot of the stack. Had she attempted to slide down it the night before, the impetus of the motion would have

carried her down with sufficient force to endanger her life. Sarah descended to the ground on the other side of the stack, and began to pick her way among the debris composed of scattered bits of timber and rocks, with here and there a dead cow or sheep. Her surroundings were unfamiliar and she knew not which way to turn until she espied at a little distance a slave running; him she called in a loud voice; he turned at the sound of her voice and quickly came to her assistance.

She explained to him all that had happened and asked him to direct her to Naaman's palace. He promised to do so and Sarah assured him that her mistress would reward him. As they passed along Sarah noticed that many of the humble dwellings had been destroyed, although the seismatic convulsion had done but little damage to most of the more substantial build-

ings, which, in Syria, are constructed with the view of withstanding these upheavals, to which it is subject.

Sarah was still in an unfamiliar quarter of the city when she saw approaching her a female slave whom she recognized as Fatoom, Susanah's chief story teller. Sarah hailed her gladly, and Fatoom drew near; she eyed Sarah, however, with somewhat of cold disfavor. Sarah hastened to tell her all that had occurred, and then anxiously inquired after her mistress.

"She lieth ill of a fever," answered Fatoom, brusquely.

At this news Sarah hastened her footsteps, although she already was walking rapidly. In her haste she stumbled and her foot caught in a shrub, turning her ankle. With an expression of pain she stopped, then strove to move on again; but it was useless, her ankle was sprained, and she could no longer walk.

After a short consultation Fatoom agreed to return to the palace and send help to Sarah, and a reward to the man slave who had assisted her. Meanwhile, the man lifted Sarah in his arms and bore her into a house near by where the occupants kindly agreed to shelter her until help should arrive.

Sarah lay for quite two hours on a rug, well supplied with pillows, and her ankle had been bathed with liniment and bound by a slave of the household. Fatoom returned at last with a litter and a suitable reward for the man.

The two men who now lifted Sarah and bore her to the litter were strangers to her, and she marveled a little, knowing all of Naaman's household. But she asked no questions, being happy in the thought that she would soon be back at the palace. The curtains were drawn, the litter lifted to

the shoulders of the two men, and Sarah was borne away. Presently an overpowering drowsiness seized her and Sarah fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

Naaman's gratitude for his recovery was boundless. He resolved to return to Elisha and insist upon the prophet's acceptance of the gifts he had brought. He also desired to make an acknowledgment to Elisha which would atone for his unreasonable temper the day the prophet bid him go and wash in Jordan. This time he would take no denial, but would urge his way into the prophet's presence and beg him humbly to take the wealth which Naaman could so easily spare. That his return to Samaria would prolong his absence from home and Susanah, counted little with Naaman in his generous gratitude. Susanah's joy at his complete recovery would compensate her for

some delay. Therefore, Naaman hastened back to Samaria.

Elisha tried to refuse Naaman admittance as before, but Naaman pleaded so humbly to be allowed only to speak to the prophet that he at last was admitted. When he stood before the man of God he said, in a voice trembling with strong emotion:

"Behold, now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; now, therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant."

This was indeed an humble and courageous speech for the proud Syrian to make. Elisha admired the manly resolution and sincerity of purpose which impelled it. But the prophet wished to impress upon this whilom heathen that to God alone he owed his debt of gratitude; that the gift of God could not be bought with earthly treasure, and that God's prophets were not actuated by selfish

motives. He answered Naaman firmly:

"As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none."

Naaman saw that further argument would be useless. He was converted to the God of Israel, however, and he desired Elisha to have knowledge of this truth. He therefore asked quite humbly:

"Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord."

Elisha's eyes softened. He realized that Naaman's conversion was genuine and complete. Naaman's desire for the earth was founded upon something deeper than the popular prejudice that every land has its deity, who must be worshiped at an altar made from the land where that deity reigns.

This was proved by his words, "I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Deep in his loyal heart Naaman wished a small portion of the land of Israel, which would be ground consecrated to the true God, and a monument to Him in a heathen land. Naaman was an officer high in rank, with great influence. His conversion from Polytheism to Monotheism meant the certain proclamation of Israel's faith in Syria. Surely the Lord God of Israel would bless Naaman and prosper him. Elisha saw all this with prophetic vision; he therefore said:

"Thy desire shall be granted, and may the God of Israel teach thee and bless thee, henceforth."

Naaman turned to go, but his sensitive conscience apprised him at once of a difficulty. It was his duty to accompany Ben-hadad into the temple of Rimmon, when the King went there

to worship. Would this act be deemed disloyalty to the God of Israel whom he now determined to worship? Better renunciation of his office than this if it were to be counted hypocrisy. He consequently said to Elisha:

"When my master, the King, goeth into the house of Rimmon, to worship there, he leaneth on my hand; and when he boweth, I bow myself; will the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing?"

Elisha deliberated. Naaman's bowing down would not indicate an actual deed of worship on his part; it would merely mean assisting his king in that ceremony. To discontinue the exercise of this office would mean for Naaman to resign his position and his nationality, and become an Israelite. Elisha recognized the fact that this would be to frustrate God's design in Naaman's conversion, for if he remained in Syria he would be a witness

to the true God, and disseminate the report of his miraculous recovery; thus would the knowledge of the Hebrew faith be spread abroad in Syria. Reasoning thus, Elisha answered:

"The Lord will surely pardon this act which cometh not of the heart; go in peace."

Naaman now departed with his last doubt dispelled, and all uncertainty as to his future actions set at rest. He drove along rapidly with a heart happy and light, eager to reach Susanah and tell her the wondrous, joyful news.

The caravan had traveled but three miles when a man was seen running toward them from the direction of Elisha's house; Naaman called a halt, fearing some evil had befallen the prophet.

This man was Gehazi, a servant of Elisha, who had been seized with covetousness when he thought of all the

wealth that his master had refused, and that Naaman was about to return with to his own country. Gehazi argued with himself that he had a right to demand something of this heathen—this Gentile, who was the natural enemy of Israel. Therefore he pursued after the chariot, from which Naaman now descended in his desire to show respect to Elisha through his servant. Naaman asked, anxiously:

"Is all well?"

"All is well," answered Gehazi. "My master hath sent me saying, 'Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of raiment.'"

Gehazi's request had the color of reasonableness considering how much Naaman had brought with him. Moreover he was ready for any

possible questions with the answer that there were schools of prophets to be publicly maintained at Bethel and Gilgal on Mount Ephraim. But the unsuspicious Naaman had no thought of questioning Gehazi; he rejoiced that Elisha had apparently relented a little, being sorely pressed, perhaps, by the unexpected demand upon him by the two young students. He quickly bound with his own hands two talents of silver in two sacks; and two changes of garments in other sacks. Laying these upon two of his servants he commanded them to bear the same to Elisha, with his grateful acknowledgments for this privilege.

Now there was a hill near Elisha's house which concealed the road from the prophet's view. Here Gehazi paused and politely relieved the two servants of their burden; the whole being placed at Gehazi's disposal the slaves were dismissed and Gehazi

hastily concealed the treasure. This being done he returned quickly into Elisha's house, for he was seldom long out of the prophet's presence.

CHAPTER XII.

Gehazi went in and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him:

"Whence comest thou, Gehazi?"

"Thy servant went no whither," answered Gehazi, with an air of affected surprise.

Elisha looked at his servant with eyes blazing with indignation; he said sternly:

"Went I not with thee in spirit when Naaman turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is this a time to receive money and garments when a Gentile was to be taught the beauty of the Hebrew faith? Thy thoughts had run ahead to the buying of vineyards and oliveyards; of sheep and oxen; of men servants and maid servants. Thou seest that I know all thy covetous heart. Therefore, I say unto

thee, that the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever."

Gehazi turned sullenly from his master's presence, scarce believing that the awful curse would bear fruit. At the outer door he met a man who started back from him in horror. Seeing this significant action Gehazi falteringly inquired:

"What aileth thee?"

"Behold, now, knowest thou not that thou art a leper, white as snow?"

At this confirmation of his fears Gehazi raised his hands and looked, and, behold, they were indeed white as snow. With a groan of anguish he fell back against the wall. First he had tainted his soul with the leprosy of ill-gotten riches; now his body must bear about always this evidence of the prophet's curse. The stranger spoke again:

"How camest thou in this strait?

and how is it that thou knew it not?"

Gehazi related the circumstances, and the stranger said:

"Lo, Jehovah hath greatly shown his power this day; but I would speak with thy master. Is he still within?"

Gehazi answered in the affirmative and, pointing to Elisha's door he said: "Do thou enter there?" and then, with head bowed low upon his breast, he walked away.

The stranger opened the door of Elisha, and stood in the prophet's presence, saying:

"Art thou Elisha? art thou that prophet?"

Elisha answered: "I am he. What is thy name, and the cause of thy visit?"

"Thy servant's name is Micaiah, and I have strange news for thee," answered the stranger.

"Art thou indeed Micaiah, that

prophet of God whom Ahab did cast into prison? Behold, now, I have sought to visit thee, but was denied."

"Aye, I am that prophet. Thou wert denied because such were Ahab's orders."

"How camest thou, then, to be free? and who hath released thee?"

"The Lord God of Israel hath sent an earthquake, and, behold, the prison doors flew open, and I stepped forth."

"I had heard naught of it," said Elisha. "When happened this thing?"

"This day, but a short time since. Many houses in Samaria are destroyed. Thy servant waited for none of these things, but inquired the way to thee."

"Micaiah," said Elisha, solemnly. "The Lord hath this day delivered thee; and as the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, thou shalt henceforth abide with me."

"The prophecy of thy servant, Micaiah, hath become true, for one told

me on the way hither that Zedekiah, the false prophet, did hide himself in his house, and was destroyed in it by the earthquake."

"The Lord is mighty and valiant, and He remembereth His servants. Let us worship Him, and praise His name together."

Thus was all of Micaiah's prophecy fulfilled, and the faithful servant of God was restored to a life of peace and usefulness.

Meanwhile, Naaman had once more resumed his interrupted journey, but, as his way lay outside the seismatic wave which had caused the upheaval at Damascus and Samaria in its devious course toward the south, he was not disturbed by it. Long before he reached Damascus, however, he saw indications of the late earthquake, and he hastened on his journey with all possible speed, a little anxious now for the welfare of Susanah.

One night after they had pitched their tents, and all but the watch were peacefully sleeping, they were attacked by a band of Arabs. It was just at the edge of the desert which lies to the south of Damascus, and across a part of which Naaman must travel on his way to his home. The followers of Naaman rallied quickly, for the travelers in the East at that time were always on their guard. The Syrians fought valiantly under their stalwart leader, and, although the Arabs outnumbered them, in an hour the battle was over; the ground was strewn with dead Arabs and camels, and but few of the Syrians were killed, and fewer still wounded. When all was over Arpad entered Naaman's tent escorting a female captive; it was Sarah.

CHAPTER XIII.

Both Sarah and Naaman were undemonstrative people, but neither could repress an exclamation of surprise at this unexpected and strange meeting. Sarah was the first to recover:

"Thou art healed, my lord Naaman!" exclaimed she, glancing at his hands; "thou art healed—thou didst find the prophet, and he hath healed thee, hath he not?"

"Aye, Sarah," answered Naaman, "the prophet Elisha hath healed me, and I will henceforth worship no other gods, but the God of Israel. Whence comest thou? and how didst thou fall among the Arabs?"

"Thy servant was in thy palace and there came an earthquake which affrighted my lady Susanah. While

I sought for wine to give her thy servant, Cheta, did seize me, and bound my eyes, and he bore me away; and it was night. Now, behold the earthquake did increase, and thy servant Sarah was thrown violently upon a stack of fodder; thus did the God of Israel deliver me out of the hand of Cheta. I found a man servant who sought to show me the way, but Fatoom met me and she said unto me:

"'Thy lady Susanah lieth ill of a fever.'

"Then I made haste, my foot stumbled, and my ankle was sprained. Fatoom went unto thy palace to bring me help, and lo, she brought two strange men who lifted me into a litter. I hoped soon to be with my lady Susanah, but a strange odor filled my nostrils, and thy servant sank into a sleep.

"How long thy servant slept I know not. When I awoke, lo, my

head was heavy with pain, and my tongue was dry and parched. I cried out faintly but none heeded me. Then I reached for the curtains and drew them aside. It was deep night, and thy servant's heart failed with fear, for I knew not where I was. I called aloud and thy servant, the dwarf Kaftu, came running; he said unto me:

"'Art thou awake? what wouldst thou?'

"'Water first, if thou please,' I answered.

"Kaftu brought me some water and I inquired of him: 'Why am I here? and whither do they take me?'

"Kaftu ran by the side of my litter and said:

"'Be thou still; I have somewhat to say to thee. Thou dost remember that Fatoom left thee to seek help at the palace. Lo, before she came Cheta was carried in; the earthquake

had thrown him among some trees, and he was maimed. Fatoom loveth him. When she reached the palace, behold, now, she had heard about Cheta, and she hastened to him. Our lady Susanah is very ill, and my lord Beka was distraught; therefore, the slaves went whither they would. When Fatoom saw Cheta she said unto him:

"'"Behold, now, Sarah hath sprained her ankle, and I am come for help."

"'"Where sawest thou Sarah!" demanded Cheta.

"'Then Fatoom told him how she had met thee.

"'"Go thou unto the Arabs, whose caravan leaveth Damascus this night, and send Bardesanes unto me. He oweth his life to me, and he will do me a favor," said Cheta.

"'"What wouldst thou with Bardesanes?" asked Fatoom.

"'"I would have this Sarah taken away, for now I hate her. Do thou as I bid thee, and thou shalt wed me, if thou wilt."

"'Then Fatoom hastened for Bardesanes, and I listened again at the door, for I knew they were plotting mischief against thee. Cheta persuaded Bardesanes, and he promised to take thee if Cheta would give him a kikkar of gold for his men. Cheta gave him two kikkars of gold, and behold, thou knowest all now.'

"'But Kaftu, why did I sleep so soundly?' I asked. 'My head bursteth with pain. And why didst thou come with the Arabs?'

"'For this purpose came I, that I might protect and aid thee, if might be, because thou wert ever kind to me, and I love thee.'

"Thus answered thy servant, Kaftu; and he bathed my head with water, and bade me hope for he would

help me to escape. Will my lord now inquire for the lad? for I would know now he fareth."

Naaman was greatly surprised at Sarah's story, and his anger was enkindled against Fatoom and Cheta. He called his servant, Arpad, and told him to see the dwarf, and bring him news of the boy. Then he said to Sarah:

"These vile slaves, of whom thou hast told me, shall be crushed under my chariot wheels when I return."

"Nay, let not my lord say so," said Sarah, gently. "Do thou send them, rather, into another country."

"Thy heart is noble, Sarah, and it shall be as thou sayest. Thou shalt return unto Damascus with me, and there will I provide thee escort to return to thine own country; for thou shalt be free."

Arpad entered at this moment with the dwarf Kaftu, and Naaman spoke to the lad, saying:

"Sarah hath told me of what thou hast done. Thou art a brave lad, and true. When we are returned to Damascus thou shalt be well rewarded."

Then they all departed for their tents for the remainder of the night; but the first paling star of morning saw the caravan again on its way, for Naaman was consumed with anxiety regarding Susanah.

CHAPTER XIV.

Beka had been, indeed, almost distracted. It was true that the earthquake had done but slight damage to the palace of Naaman, and no one within its walls had been seriously injured; but Susanah's fright, added to her anxiety regarding her husband, had thrown her into a brain fever.

Beka was little more than a lad, and had been reared in an atmosphere of enervating idleness. The disappearance of Sarah; the alarm caused by the earthquake, which the superstitious Syrian always believes will cause the sea to overflow the land and drown him; and Susanah's sudden illness all combined to confuse and distract him. The latter circumstance, however, finally roused him, and, throwing off the lethargy

which had possessed him, he set his mind to bringing order out of the wild confusion in the palace. He assumed control of the household, and the slaves soon discovered that their lord Beka could be firm, as well as kind. He called in the physicians for Susanah, who lay in delirium, calling constantly for Naaman and Sarah. He sent agents and officers in every direction to search for Sarah and, as day after day passed by and he could learn nothing regarding her, he became less and less hopeful. Her strange disappearance was still wrapped in mystery, and his honest nature was too simple to suspect Cheta of treachery.

These troublous events, succeeding each other with so overwhelming swiftness, developed all the latent manliness within him, and Beka was no longer the irresponsible and vacillating youth; he was become a man, brave, reliable and faithful.

One day he sat beside Susanah's couch and watched her lily-pale face. She had lain quiet and passive for several hours, and the physicians had told Beka that if she awoke and knew him, he might hope for her recovery. Beka waited patiently and thought of many things. He wondered if Sarah had left the palace that night on some errand, and been swallowed up by the earthquake. Many of the bazaars in the street called Straight had been demolished; perhaps Sarah had gone there for some forgotten article necessary to her mistress' toilet, and she might have been killed there. Was she now in that paradise of which she had told him? and if she were there could he hope ever to join her? He firmly determined that come what might he would worship Sarah's God; "For," thought he, "she was good and true, and if her faith made her so then shall Sarah's faith be mine."

Then his thoughts turned again to Susanah, who lay so calm and still, almost as if she were dead; she was only sleeping, but would she awake in this world, or would her eyes open in another where, perhaps, Sarah would meet her.

The palace was very still. It was the noon hour and the slaves were all in a distant part of the palace, except one who watched in the court near by to be in call if needed.

"Why tarry the chariot wheels of my brother Naaman? O Susanah! wilt thou never awake?"

As if in answer to this inward cry of Beka Susanah opened her dark eyes and looked at him; he instantly laid a gently restraining hand upon her.

"Thou hast been ill, Susanah, and must not weary thyself with questions now. All is well."

This tender little subterfuge satis-

fied Susanah for a few moments and she lay still with closed eyes. Presently the faintest tinge of rose crept into her cheeks and she whispered:

"Beka, hearest thou his chariot wheels?"

"Nay, Susanah, question me not now. All is well, and the leech hath said thou must not talk."

"But I hear the wheels," insisted Susanah. "Go thou, my Beka, and see if Naaman is come."

Wishing to humor her Beka called the slave to watch Susanah while he hastened to the gate of the courtyard. Susanah was right, the caravan was in sight. Beka hastened back with the news.

"Aye, Susanah, 'tis the chariot wheels of Naaman, though I know not how thou couldst hear them."

"Love hath sharp ears," said Susanah, smiling. "Go dear Beka, greet Naaman, and bring him hither quickly."

But Naaman needed no urging, for he had already leaped from his chariot and came running. Beka met him and raised his hand, warningly. Naaman stopped his eager feet and said, in a low, anxious voice:

"How fareth my wife, Susanah? tell me, I pray thee, quickly."

"She hath been very sick, and the leech hath said she must be quiet; but she hath heard thy chariot wheels."

Naaman walked softly, but swiftly, in to Susanah. His eyes were filled with a glad new light; his arms were extended; the glow of restored health was in his happy face. Susanah looked and knew that Sarah's God had not failed her. Naaman clasped her in his arms and, for the first time in a year, kissed her on the lips.

"Dear Naaman," whispered Susanah, "we will love the God of Sarah, and trust Him evermore."

CHAPTER XV.

Beka went out to meet the caravan that Naaman and Susanah might be alone with their new found joy. He had seen at once that Naaman was healed, and rejoiced for his brother and Susanah. If Sarah could only know that Naaman was healed by the prophet of her God, how happy it would make her, he thought. As he walked along, his languid eyes were attracted by the sight of a lady descending from her litter, assisted by the dwarf, Kaftu. Beka secretly wondered who she could be, but as Sarah was veiled, and still limped a little in her walk, Beka did not recognize her. When the lady had almost reached him she threw aside her veil and said, anxiously:

"My mistress, Susanah, how fareth she?"

Beka was dumb with amazement for a moment; then he eagerly seized her hands, and heeding not her question said rapturously:

"Is it thou? is it thou, indeed, Sarah? where hast thou been? we have searched everywhere for thee."

"Aye, it is thy servant, Sarah, and —"

"Say not so," interrupted Beka, in a firm voice. "Thou shalt nevermore be called servant. But come with me apart, for I have somewhat to say to thee."

Could this be Beka? Sarah scarcely recognized in this self-possessed, masterful man the lad of a few weeks before. She hesitated, then said:

"Thou hast not yet told me how my lady Susanah fareth."

"Come with me, dear Sarah, and I will tell thee all," said Beka; and

gently leading her, Beka took her to a retired spot in the court.

An hour later Beka led Sarah into Susanah's presence, where Naaman still was. Naaman smiled.

"Hast thou forestalled us, Beka? We were but now talking of Sarah."

"I am come," said Beka, "to ask for Sarah's freedom, for I desire her for my wife."

"But doth she desire thee for her husband?" asked Naaman, with a merry twinkle in his eyes. "Methinks another hath spoken for her."

Beka's eyes flashed at this allusion to Cheta, but Sarah spoke:

"Nay, heed him not, Beka"—and Sarah pronounced the man's name shyly—"my lord Naaman hath already promised me my freedom, and an escort to my father."

"Then that escort shall be thy Beka," said the young man, proudly. "Perchance thy father will not re-

fuse thee to me when he knoweth that thy God is become my God, dear Sarah."

"Aye," said Naaman reverently; "there is no other god but the God of Israel, and henceforth Him only shall we serve."

APPENDIX.

Lange pronounces the story of Naaman, as found in the 5th chapter of second Kings, "The scheme of salvation epitomized."

In writing the story I have endeavored as far as possible to use the exact language of the Bible. I have consulted such books as Lange's, Keil's and Cook's Commentaries; Smith's "Bible Dictionary;" Ridpath's "Ancient History;" "The Land of Gilead," by Oliphant; "Patriarchal Palestine," by Sayce; "The Pillar of Fire," by Ingraham; and several books of travel too numerous to mention here.

The reader will find by consulting the Oxford Bible that the carbuncle is given as a green stone, similar to our emerald. Also, that most of the

names used in the story have been chosen for their significance. I am aware that roses, as we know them, were not supposed to grow in Syria; but accurate information regarding this country, its fauna and flora, and its ancient domestic life and customs, is difficult to obtain.

The book is offered to the public in the hope that the wonderful and fascinating story of Naaman's healing may find new interest and new significance. With this hope I venture to send it forth.

THE AUTHOR.

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